AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the

application:

Listing of Claims:

1.   (Currently amended) A method for communicating electronic information comprising

the computer-implemented steps of:

intercepting a message that has been sent from a first participant to a second

participant prior to said message arriving at said second participant;

wherein intercepting the message is performed by a device coupled between a

plurality of clients and a plurality of servers;

wherein said message includes identifier information;

wherein said first participant is one of a service requestor and a service

provider and the second participant is the other of the service requestor

and the service provider; and

on said device, determining the identity of the first participant based on said identifier

information in said message;

on said device, using said identity to maintain a log of the interaction between said

first participant by said second participant; and

wherein said log is based at least in part on reply messages that pass through said

device.

2.   (Currently amended) The method of Claim 1 wherein:

~~the step of intercepting a message is performed by a device coupled between a~~

~~plurality of clients and a plurality of servers;~~

~~the method~~ further comprising the step of identifying which services are being

provided to said clients by said servers based on the content of messages that

pass through said device; and

billing said clients for said services based on which services are being provided to

said clients by said servers.

3.   (Original) The method of Claim 2 wherein:

the device is controlled by a first party, and the services are provided by a set of

second parties; and

the first party performs the step of billing on behalf of the set of second parties.

4.   (Currently amended) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the

computer-implemented steps of:

determining whether said message has billing implications;

if said message has billing implications, then generating [a] the log; and

using said log to charge [said] a particular participant for a service

indicated in the message, wherein said particular participant is

one of said first participant and said second participant.

5.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 wherein the log includes a service

requestor identification.

6.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 wherein the log includes information

to indicate how much the particular participant is to pay for the service.

7.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 further comprising the computer-

implemented step of sending a plurality of logs, including said log, to an

aggregation engine that places access information contained in said

plurality of logs into the format required by a billing system.

8.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 further comprises:

determining that the particular participant must pre-pay for the service;

determining whether the particular participant has sufficient funds to pay for the

        service; and

determining how to handle said message based on whether said particular participant

        has sufficient funds to pay for the service.

9.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 further comprising the computer-implemented

steps of:

inspecting a provider profile associated with the service provider; and

determining that the service requestor must pre-pay for the service based on the

        provider profile.

10.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 further comprising the computer-implemented
steps of:

inspecting a requestor profile associated with the service requestor; and

determining that the service requestor must pre-pay for the service based on the

requestor profile.

11.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 further wherein the message is a response from

the service provider and includes a price at which the service provider is willing to

provide the service.

12.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 wherein the service involves providing content

from the service provider.

13.   (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the steps of:

determining a service class for said first participant based on the identity of the first

participant; and

determining where to direct said message to based on said service class.

14.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 further comprising the steps of:

determining a service class for said first participant based on the identity of the first

participant; and

wherein the service that the service requestor is provided is determined by said

service class.

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15.   (Currently amended) The method for Claim 4 further comprising the step of updating

a service requestor profile based on the service that is requested.

16.   (Currently amended) The method for Claim 4 further comprising the step of

decrementing an account balance of the particular participant when the service

requestor accesses the service.

17.   (Original) The method for Claim 4 further comprising the step of determining from

the message the service that is requested by the service requestor.

18.   (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented

step of:

  locating a profile based on the identity of the first participant.

19.   (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising the computer-implemented

step of:

  storing billing data associated with the service requestor in the profile.

20.   (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising the computer-implemented

step of:

  determining a price that the service requestor will pay for a service from the profile.

21.   (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising the computer-implemented step of:

billing the service requestor if the profile indicates that the service requestor is to be billed.

22.   (Original) The method for Claim 18 wherein the step of locating the profile further comprises the computer-implemented step of:

extracting a participant ID from the message; and

locating the profile based on a participant ID.

23.   (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising maintaining an account balance in the profile.

24.   (Currently amended) The method for Claim 18 further comprising decrementing [the] an account balance of the service requestor when the service requestor accesses a service wherein the service was specified in the message and wherein the service requires a fee.

25.   (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising updating the profile to award the service requestor a prize for having requested said service.

26.   (Original) The method for Claim 18 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

extracting a number from the profile;

wherein the number indicates the number of times the service requestor has

requested a service;

incrementing the number;

storing the number back into the profile; and

determining whether to bill the service requestor for the service based on the number.

27.   (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented

step of:

determining whether the service requestor is allowed access to a service based on

information in a profile.

28.   (Original) The method for Claim 27 further comprising the computer-implemented

steps of:

if the service requestor is not allowed access to the service, then

sending the service requestor a second message indicating that the service

requestor is not allowed access to the service.

29.   (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented

steps of:

if the service requestor requires pre-authorization for a service

sending the service requestor a payment authorization message; and

if the service requestor authorizes payment for the service, then

retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain the service for the service requestor.

30.   (Original) The method for Claim 29 further comprising inspecting a profile to determine whether the service requestor requires pre-authorization for the service.

31.   (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

determining whether the service requestor has funds to pay for a service based on an authorization source.

32.   (Original) The method for Claim 31 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

if the service requestor has the funds, then

causing the funds to be decremented from a requestor account associated with the service requestor; and

retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain the service for the service requestor.

33.   (Original) The method for Claim 31 wherein the authorization source is a profile.

34.   (Original) The method for Claim 31 wherein the authorization source is a billing system.

35.   (Original) The method for Claim 31 wherein the authorization source is a billing scheme of an access provider.

36.   (Original) The method for Claim 1 further comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

determining whether the service provider is an authorized partner; and

if the service provider is an authorized partner, then

    retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain a service.

37.   (Original) The method for Claim 36 wherein the step of determining whether the service provider is an approved partner further comprises the computer-implemented steps of:

determining whether the service involves a fee by inspecting a provider profile;

if the service does involve a fee, then

    establishing a secure connection with the provider; and

    authenticating the service provider by using an authentication mechanism.

38.   (Currently amended) A computer-readable medium carrying instructions for communicating electronic information, the instructions comprising instructions for performing the steps of:

intercepting a message that has been sent from a first participant to a second

    participant prior to said message arriving at said second participant;

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wherein intercepting the message is performed by a device coupled between a

plurality of clients and a plurality of servers;

wherein said message includes identifier information;

wherein said first participant is one of a service requestor and a service

provider and the second participant is the other of the service requestor

and the service provider; ~~and~~

on said device, determining the identity of the first participant based on said identifier

information in said message;

on said device, using said identity to maintain a log of the interaction between said

first participant by said second participant; and

wherein said log is based at least in part on reply messages that pass through said

device.

39. (Currently amended) The computer-readable medium for Claim 38

further comprising instructions for:

determining whether said message has billing implications;

if said message has billing implications, then generating [a] said log; and

using said log to charge [said] a particular participant for a service

indicated in the message, wherein said particular participant is

one of said first participant and said second participant.

40. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 wherein the log

includes a service requestor identification.

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41.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 wherein the log

includes information to indicate how much the particular participant is to

pay for the service.

42.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 further

comprising instructions for sending a plurality of logs, including said

log, to an aggregation engine that places access information contained in

said plurality of logs into the format required by a billing system.

43.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 further comprises

instructions for:

determining that the particular participant must pre-pay for the service;

determining whether the particular participant has sufficient funds to pay for the

service; and

determining how to handle said message based on whether said particular participant

has sufficient funds to pay for the service.

44.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 further comprising

instructions for:

inspecting a provider profile associated with the service provider; and

determining that the service requestor must pre-pay for the service based on the

provider profile.

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45.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 further comprising instructions for:

inspecting a requestor profile associated with the service requestor; and

determining that the service requestor must pre-pay for the service based on the requestor profile.

46.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 wherein the message is a response from the service provider and includes a price at which the service provider is willing to provide the service.

47.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 wherein the service involves providing content from the service provider.

48.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 38 further comprising instructions for:

determining a service class for said first participant based on the identity of the first participant; and

determining where to direct said message to based on said service class.

49.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 further comprising instructions for:

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determining a service class for said first participant based on the identity of the first

participant; and

wherein the service that the service requestor is provided is determined by said

service class.

50.   (Currently amended) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 further

comprising instructions for updating a <u>service requestor</u> profile based on the service

that is requested.

51.   (Currently amended) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 further

comprising instructions for decrementing an account balance <u>of the particular</u>

<u>participant</u> when the service requestor accesses the service.

52.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 39 further comprising

instructions for determining from the message the service that is requested by the

service requestor.

53.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 38 further comprising

instructions for:

locating a profile based on the identity of the first participant.

54.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 53 further comprising

instructions for:

storing billing data associated with the service requestor in the profile.

55.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 53 further comprising

        instructions for:

        determining a price that the service requestor will pay for a service from the profile.

56.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 53 further comprising

        instructions for:

        billing the service requestor if the profile indicates that the service requestor is to be

             billed.

57.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 53 wherein instructions for

        locating the profile further comprises instructions for:

        extracting a participant ID from the message; and

        locating the profile based on a participant ID.

58.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 53 further comprising

        instructions for maintaining an account balance in the profile.

59.   (Currently amended) The computer-readable medium for Claim 53 further

        comprising instructions for decrementing [the] an account balance of the service

        requestor when the service requestor accesses a service wherein the service was

        specified in the message and wherein the service requires a fee.

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60. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 53 further comprising instructions for updating the profile to award the service requestor a prize for having requested said service.

61. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 53 further comprising instructions for.

Extracting a number from the profile;

wherein the number indicates the number of times the service requestor has requested a service;

incrementing the number;

storing the number back into the profile; and

determining whether to bill the service requestor for the service based on the number.

62. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 38 further comprising instructions for:

determining whether the service requestor is allowed access to a service based on information in a profile.

63. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 62 further comprising instructions for:

if the service requestor is not allowed access to the service, then

sending the service requestor a second message indicating that the service

requestor is not allowed access to the service.

64. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 38 further comprising

instructions for:

if the service requestor requires pre-authorization for a service

sending the service requestor a payment authorization message; and

if the service requestor authorizes payment for the service, then

retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain the service for the

service requestor.

65. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 64 further comprising

instructions for inspecting a profile to determine whether the service requestor

requires pre-authorization for the service.

66. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 38 further comprising

instructions for:

determining whether the service requestor has funds to pay for a service based on an

authorization source.

67. (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 66 further comprising

instructions for:

if the service requestor has the funds, then

causing the funds to be decremented from a requestor account associated with

the service requestor; and

retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain the service for the

service requestor.

68.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 66 wherein the authorization

source is a profile.

69.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 66 wherein the authorization

source is a billing system.

70.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 66 wherein the authorization

source is a billing scheme of an access provider.

71.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 38 further comprising

instructions for:

determining whether the service provider is an authorized partner; and

if the service provider is an authorized partner, then

retransmitting the message to the service provider to obtain a service.

72.   (Original) The computer-readable medium for Claim 71 wherein instructions for

determining whether the service provider is an approved partner further comprise

instructions for:

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determining whether the service involves a fee by inspecting a provider profile;

if the service does involve a fee, then

establishing a secure connection with the provider; and

authenticating the service provider by using an authentication mechanism.

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